

RESTORATION UPDATE

A newsletter on the Salton Sea Restoration Project

Salton Sea Authority

December 2004/January 2005

www.saltonsea.ca.gov

Authority to Pursue Salton Sea Local Control Act

The Salton Sea Authority (SSA) is pursuing state legislation to put restoration of the Sea back in the hands of local authorities.

The “Salton Sea Local Control Act” would designate the SSA as the implementing agency for the Salton Sea restoration project and free the Authority to implement a locally determined project which, in addition to providing permanent ecosystem and wildlife protection values, would also include recreational and economic benefits. This would happen provided that the Authority could demonstrate that the locally selected project achieves the same ecosystem and wildlife protection values as achieved in the state’s preferred alternative and the SSA provides at least \$500 million in non-state and non-federal funding for implementing its restoration project.

Provided these conditions are met, the \$300 million in the Salton Sea Restoration Fund (funds generated by local water sales) and any remaining Proposition 50 funds designated for Salton Sea restoration would be transferred to the SSA for implementation of the Authority’s locally selected restoration plan. The California Department of Fish and Game, in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Geological Survey, would make the determination as to whether the SSA’s local plan will provide the same (or better) ecosystem and wildlife protection values as the state’s preferred alternative.

Under this proposed legislation all current Salton Sea inflows would be per-

SALTON SEA RESTORATION ACT

SB 654. CHAPTER 613.

obligations or in-kind contributions of any kind for restoration of the Salton Sea shall be required of the Imperial Irrigation District, the Coachella Valley Water District, the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, and the San Diego County Water Authority, including federal cost-sharing or other federal requirements. Any future state actions to restore the Salton Sea will be the sole responsibility of the State of California.

(d) As used in this section, “environmental mitigation requirements”

The proposed legislation would designate the Salton Sea Authority as the implementing agency and take the state off the hook for all costs and liability.

manently dedicated to the Sea after the internal consumptive use needs of IID, Coachella Valley Water District and the Torres Martinez tribe are met. As the project operator once construction is complete, SSA would be required to setup and fund an environmental impairment account. In addition, the SSA would indemnify the state against future environmental liabilities and Department of Water Resources spending on its current legislatively mandated restoration study would be limited to a maximum of \$10 million in Proposition 50 funds.

“It is becoming more and more evident that the primary purpose of the State’s involvement in Salton Sea restoration is to assure the possibility of future water transfers out of Imperial County,” said Salton Sea Authority Board President and Imperial County Supervisor Gary Wyatt. “The Salton Sea inflow water rightfully belongs to IID and Imperial County. We have the

right to put this water to beneficial uses in a restored Salton Sea that provides ecological, recreational and economic benefits for our area. The future transfer of an additional 500,000 acre-feet of water out of Imperial County, as assumed by the State in its criteria for evaluating the feasibility of restoration alternatives, would destroy the Salton Sea’s ecology, create air quality problems in the Coachella Valley and Imperial County and be an economic disaster for current residents by the Sea.”

One of the benefits of the Salton Sea Local Control Act is that it would allow the State to remove itself from responsibility for the costs and liability for the Salton Sea that were assumed under the QSA water transfers. This would insure that taxpayers in other parts of the state do not foot the total bill for saving the Sea.

Current state law makes the Department of Water Resources “responsible for any

environmental impacts, including Salton Sea salinity, related to use or transfer” of water under the Quantification Settlement Agreement signed in October 2003. Water transfer legislation also required that any future state actions to restore the Salton Sea would be the sole responsibility of the State of California. To deal with this liability, current state law directs the Secretary of Resources to submit a study recommending a state-preferred alternative to the legislature by December 31, 2006. This study must also include a proposed financing plan for implementing the state’s preferred alternative. Under current state law the Resources Agency is specifically precluded from considering “the protection of recreational opportunities” and including “creation of improved local economic conditions around the Sea” as project purposes under the state’s study.

As matters now stand, the Salton Sea represents an enormous financial liability for the state. With the Salton Sea Local Control Act, what the SSA is basically offering the legislature is a way to take the state’s taxpayers off the hook for all costs and liability in exchange for letting the local jurisdictions fund a restoration plan that will meet all objectives.

Same. The bill would require the money deposited in the fund to be expended, upon appropriation by the Legislature, for various purposes relating to the restoration of the Salton Sea. The bill would authorize the Department of Water Resources to contract with water suppliers to purchase and sell water made available by specified means to achieve the goals of the act.

(2) Existing law requires the Resources Agency and the Technology, Trade, and Commerce Agency, in consultation with

The Salton Sea Restoration Act authorizes DWR to “sell water,” but it doesn’t state whose water they would be selling.

The SSA is confident that it can put \$500 million of local financing on the table as soon as a project-level EIR can be completed on the local restoration plan. The local bond funds, along with the \$300 million in Salton Sea Restoration Funds and other local funding sources, will enable the SSA’s locally preferred restoration plan to be 100% locally financed.

The Authority remains concerned that the state’s process will not result in the timely implementation of any restoration project. According to Ron Enzweiler, Executive Director Salton Sea Authority, “My personal experience in working on drainage issues in the San Joaquin Valley and on the CALFED Bay Delta program is that the time interval from completing a PEIR and actual imple-

mentation of major on-the-ground capital projects managed at the state level can be five years or more. In the case of the Salton Sea, we cannot afford a multi-year delay in implementation after the state’s study is completed in 2006. The Salton Sea Local Control Act will give the SSA the ability to proceed immediately with implementation, using its own funds in 2007 once the state’s preferred alternative is determined in 2006.”

The SSA has asked State Senator Denise Ducheny, whose district includes the Salton Sea, to introduce the Salton Sea Local Control Act in this legislative session.

This proposed legislation will be discussed and possibly endorsed for enactment by the Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors at its January 27th meeting.

California Resources Secretary Announces Funding for Salton Sea Ecosystem Restoration Project

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – (BUSINESS WIRE) – Jan. 14, 2005 - California Resources Agency Secretary Mike Chrisman today announced that the Salton Sea Authority will receive \$750,000 for a pilot treatment project for selenium removal. The project is part of the Resources Agency’s Salton Sea ecosystem restoration study.

“The state is strongly committed to restoring the Salton Sea ecosystem and the permanent protection of the fish and wildlife dependent on that ecosystem,” said Chrisman. “Today’s action to provide additional financial support for the Salton Sea Authority’s selenium removal pilot testing

is another important step to preserve this valuable resource for future generations.”

The announcement was made during a meeting of the Resources Secretary’s Salton Sea Advisory Committee. The Committee provides assistance and consultation to the Resources Agency, which is required by state law to prepare the Salton Sea ecosystem restoration plan by the end of 2006.

“We are pleased to receive this funding and cooperate with the Resources Agency on this project,” said Ron Enzweiler, executive director of the Salton Sea Authority. “The selenium management plan will be a key

component of any successful restoration project.”

Secretary Chrisman also announced that the California Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) and the Salton Sea Authority are discussing a project that could fund a comprehensive wetlands planning and development effort to improve water quality within the Salton Sea watershed.

This project would be developed in coordination with the Citizens’ Congressional Task Force on the New River. The Task Force was formed in 1997 to improve river quality and wildlife habitat. Working with the Imperial Irrigation District, U.S. Bureau of

continued from page 2

Reclamation, California's Department of Fish and Game, and other agencies, the Task Force has constructed two test wetlands. The Task Force has also identified additional sites where wetlands projects could be constructed.

Originating about 15 miles south of Mexicali, Mexico, the New River crosses the International Boundary at Calexico, California, and travels about 60 miles through Imperial County before discharging its entire

flow into the Salton Sea. It is recognized as a significant pollution problem because it carries urban runoff, untreated and partially treated municipal wastes, untreated and partially treated industrial wastes, agricultural runoff and fecal coliform bacteria. Much of the New River's channel is bordered by non-native plant species such as tamarisk, and supports only limited wildlife habitat.

For more information go to:
<http://www.saltonsea.water.ca.gov/>

Salton City Resident Claims Fish Clean-Up as Life's Work

Bryan Brinegar first arrived in the Salton Sea area twelve years ago to tend to an ailing family member. When he awoke one morning to the sight and smell of millions of dead fish in the Riviera Keys by his family's home, he pondered aloud with his father, "Dad, do you think this is a problem?"



ERS 20' Air Boat

Brinegar decided to get involved and do whatever he could to be part of the solution, and made doing so his life's mission. He created Environmental Recovery Solutions (ERS) to help the people that lived by the Sea cope with the annoying results of dead and decaying fish in the 100 plus degree heat. For the past three years with the help and financial assistance of the Salton Sea Authority, USGS and Bureau of Reclamation, ERS has been able to fulfill that mission through a program called the On-Water Fish Recovery Program. The program's primary focus is recovering the dead fish before they reach the shorelines. The reason for the program is to prevent further bio-mass accumulation on the Sea floor, to improve perception of the Sea

and to reduce odors and vectors from affecting local residents and tourists.

Fish recovery efforts take place year-round, with the warmer months creating more need as the die-offs increase when temperatures are above 80 degrees. When temperatures increase, so do algae blooms. When the blooms die precious oxygen is removed from the water causing fish-die-offs. In the warmer months, recovering the dead fish is an unpleasant daily task using a hand constructed pontoon vessel that is 50 ft. by 16 ft. that funnels fish onto a conveyer, then into a holding bin. The fish bio-mass is transferred into a 30-ton grinder that reduces the fish into a hydrolosate product which can be used for organic farming fertilizer. The feasibility of this technology is currently being tested. When die-offs exceed ERS' capacity to recovery and run the hydrolosate program at the same time the fish are transported to California Bio-Mass in Thermal and made into compost material.



Fish Die-off

MEETINGS SCHEDULE

Board of Directors

January 27th, 10:00am

Torres Martinez Indian Reservation, Thermal
Contact: Linda Quesnell (760) 564-4888

Board of Directors

February 24th, 10:00am

Imperial Irrigation District, El Centro
Contact: Linda Quesnell (760) 564-4888



Plaza La Quinta

78-401 Highway 111, Suite T

La Quinta, CA 92253 • www.saltonsea.ca.gov



ERS member of U.S. Ultralight Association

In addition to their fish recovery tasks, ERS performs weekly odor monitoring at 24 sites along the sea shore where the level of odor is rated using a scentometer. The group also surveys bird and fish activity from both an amphibious aircraft and a land based airplane as well as providing monthly water sampling for the Bureau of Reclamation. Locating fish-die off sites is accomplished through air surveillance and visual help from the Departments of Fish and Game, Fish and Wildlife Service, local residents and California State Park field staff. Due to the limited amount of time before the fish either sink to the bottom or end up on-shore the response time is critical. Having a local contractor that is located at the Sea is an ideal arrangement.

"We are first and foremost dedicated to providing any type of service that will assist in the restoration process of the Salton Sea," said Brinegar. Adding, "The only thing we care about is that the Sea be saved."

Take Part in the 8th Annual Salton Sea International Bird Festival

The public is invited to attend the 8th Annual Salton Sea International Bird Festival February 18th through the 21st. Birders may view 100 bird species per day of the over 400 recorded species known to migrate through the Salton Sea.

A variety of tours by a birding expert and community guide are offered throughout the event in comfortable, fully equipped buses and vans. The tours include easy walking portions.

The heart of the festival consists of Core Tours which visit the top birding destinations at the Salton Sea and in the Imperial Valley. The best birding is scouted prior to the festival in order to enhance the experience. This year's excursions include tours of the Salton Sea; Fig Lagoon, New River Wetlands; Brawley; the Owl Prowl and Neighborhood Birds.

Sign up early for the Target Tours which offer a more intimate birding outing on Saturday and Sunday; space is limited to six participants each.



American Avocets



A Burrowing Owl

Bird Photos by Bob Miller and/or Southwest Birders.

Specialty Tours explore the Imperial Valley and the surrounding desert agriculture - from asparagus to sand verbena. This is a prime opportunity to engage in wildlife photography and introduce the kids to birding, finding night owls and exploring sand dunes and desert washes. This year's offerings include a Parent/Child Birding Tour and Picnic, LeConte's Thrasher in the Algodones Dunes Wilderness, Agriculture of the Imperial Valley and a workshop with special photographing opportunities.

Sunset Tours Friday evening visit some of the most spectacular roosting and evening flight areas of the Salton Sea and Imperial Valley. Partake in the Fig Lagoon Tour; Sunset at Obsidian Butte; Sunset with Sandhill Cranes and the Give a Hoot Social at the Birder's Fair showcasing top-quality artwork, the latest in birding equipment and outdoor gear.

Seminars and Workshops include Success of Desert Wetlands; Preserving Desert Wildlife – Desert Wildlife Unlimited; The Future of the Salton Sea and Bird Songs.

Saturday and Sunday, the "Bird's Nest" provides hands-on activities for children to stimulate their interest in the local ecosystems and expand their avian knowledge and appreciation through conversations with birding experts and books, guides, maps, games and informational booths.

The Sunday evening banquet features a buffet dinner of local specialties, a no-host bar and a chance to mingle with like-minded birders. Keynote speakers Clair and Susan de Beauvoir will take guests on a journey of how their interest in nature photography led them from small lenses and big animals to big lenses and small animals. Their experience includes contributing to a Burrowing Owl study at the Salton Sea, banding birds in the torrid desert of Israel, tracking a radio-collared Cooper's Hawk



New River Wetlands Aerial View.

through suburbs in Southern California, sitting in the steamy rain forest of Costa Rica and participating in a photo contest on a scrub ranch on Texas.

During dinner, Nicole Perretta, a proud member of the Raven Lunatics who is lovingly referred to as Loud Lunatic, will "talk bird." With over 130 bird vocalizations in her repertoire and a Jay Leno show appearance, she will amaze attendees while she talks with the animals.

Information: (760) 344-5359 or www.newriverwetlands.com where the festival brochure and registration form are located.

E-mail: birdfest@usa.net

Birder's Checklist

Water and local birding checklists are provided. Participants are encouraged to wear casual clothing, sturdy walking shoes, and bring snacks, sunscreen, binoculars and cameras.